



REL Appalachia Ask A REL Response

Behavior and Mental Health

February 2019

Question:

What are academic and behavioral outcomes associated with student mobility due to school consolidation, particularly at the elementary school level?

Response:

Thank you for your request to our REL Reference Desk regarding evidence-based information about outcomes associated with student mobility due to school consolidation. Ask A REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the 10 Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) that, by design, functions much in the same way as a technical reference library. Ask A REL provides references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations in response to questions about available education research.

Following an established REL Appalachia research protocol, we searched for peer-reviewed articles and other research reports on student outcomes associated with student mobility due to school consolidation. We focused on identifying resources that specifically addressed the effects of school consolidation on student academic and behavioral outcomes, particularly at the elementary school level. However, our search did not yield any studies addressing behavioral outcomes, so the references listed below address academic achievement only. The sources included ERIC and other federally funded databases and organizations, research institutions, academic research databases, and general Internet search engines. For more details, please see the methods section at the end of this document.

The research team did not evaluate the quality of the resources provided in this response; we offer them only for your reference. Also, the search included the most commonly used research databases and search engines to produce the references presented here, but the references are not necessarily comprehensive, and other relevant references and resources may exist. References are listed in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance.

References

Beuchert, L., Humlum, M. K., Nielsen, H. S., & Smith, N. (2016). *The short-term effects of school consolidation on student achievement: Evidence of disruption?* (IZA Discussion Papers, No.

10195). Bonn, Germany: Institute for the Study of Labor. Retrieved from <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/147881/1/dp10195.pdf>

From the abstract: “We exploit variation stemming from school consolidations in Denmark from 2010–2011 to analyze the impact on student achievement as measured by test scores. For each student we observe enrollment and test scores one year prior to school consolidation and up to four years after. We find that school consolidation has adverse effects on achievement in the short run and that these effects are most pronounced for students exposed to school closings. Furthermore, students initially enrolled in small schools experience the most detrimental effects. The effects appear to weaken over time, suggesting that part of the effect is due to disruption.”

Mills, J. N., McGee, J. B., & Greene, J. P. (2013). *An analysis of the effect of consolidation on student achievement: Evidence from Arkansas*. Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas, Department of Education Reform. Retrieved from <http://www.uaedreform.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Mills-McGee-Greene-2013-Consolidation-and-Student-Achievement-EDRE-WP-2013-02.pdf>

From the abstract: “The consolidation of schools and districts has been one of the most widespread education reforms of the last century; however, surprisingly little research has directly investigated the effectiveness of consolidation as a reform strategy. We provide new evidence on this topic by taking advantage of a natural experiment in Arkansas that occurred when policymakers required the consolidation of all districts with average daily attendance of fewer than 350 students for two consecutive years. Using both regression discontinuity and instrumental variable models, we attempt to tease out the effects of state mandated consolidation. In general, we find that consolidation has a positive, yet practically insignificant performance impact on students from consolidating districts and a small negative performance impact for students in districts that merged with consolidating districts. School closure, a consolidation related phenomenon, is found to have a strong negative impact on affected students.”

Umut, Ö., Hansen, M., & Gonzalez, T. A. (2012). *Leg up or a boot out? Student achievement and mobility under school restructuring* (CALDER Working Paper No. 78). Washington, DC: National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research. American Institutes of Research. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED587152>

From the abstract: “School closures are increasingly common among U.S. public schools, driven by both budgetary constraints and accountability pressures to turn around low-performing schools. This paper contributes to the nascent literature on school closures by evaluating student achievement and mobility outcomes in a large-scale restructuring effort in Washington, D.C. in which 32 elementary and middle school campuses were closed or consolidated in the summer of 2008. Using longitudinal data, we investigate how student outcomes change in relation to this initiative with an instrumental variables strategy that counters the endogeneity of student assignment across schools before and after the restructuring occurred. The results show that the academic performance of students directly affected by the school restructuring experienced a temporary decline, but it

rebounded by the second school year after restructuring occurred. Additionally, we find no evidence of closure adversely inducing further mobility among affected students.”

Additional Ask A REL Responses to Consult

Ask A REL Northwest at Education Northwest. (2017). *Impact of student mobility on achievement*. Response available upon request from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/askarel/>

Additional Organizations to Consult

National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL): <http://www.ncsl.org>

From the website: “Since 1975, NCSL has been the champion of state legislatures. We’ve helped states remain strong and independent by giving them the tools, information and resources to craft the best solutions to difficult problems. Our mission is to

- Improve the quality and effectiveness of state legislatures.
- Promote policy innovation and communication among state legislatures.
- Ensure state legislatures a strong, cohesive voice in the federal system.”
- School and District Consolidation: <http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/school-and-district-consolidation.aspx>

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- "school consolidation" AND student* AND mobility AND elementary AND (outcome* OR achievement OR behavior*)

Databases and Resources

We searched ERIC, a free online library of more than 1.6 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), for relevant resources. Additionally, we searched the academic database ProQuest, Google Scholar, and the commercial search engine Google.

Reference Search and Selection Criteria

In reviewing resources, Reference Desk researchers consider—among other things—these four factors.

- Date of the publication: Searches cover information available within the last ten years, except in the case of nationally known seminal resources.

- Reference sources: IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols receive highest priority. Applicable resources must be publicly available online and in English.
- Methodology: The following methodological priorities/considerations guide the review and selection of the references: (a) study types—randomized controlled trials, quasi experiments, surveys, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, policy briefs, etc., generally in this order; (b) target population, samples (representativeness of the target population, sample size, volunteered or randomly selected), study duration, etc.; (c) limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, etc.
- Existing knowledge base: Vetted resources (e.g., peer-reviewed research journals) are the primary focus, but the research base is occasionally slim or nonexistent. In those cases, the best resources available may include, for example, reports, white papers, guides, reviews in non-peer-reviewed journals, newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, and organization websites.

Resources included in this document were last accessed on February 19, 2019. URLs, descriptions, and content included here were current at that time.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by education stakeholders in the Appalachia region (Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory Appalachia (REL AP) at SRI International. This Ask A REL response was developed by REL AP under Contract ED-IES-17-C-0004 from the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, administered by SRI International. The content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.